

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05

IGA-02 A-01 OPR-02 OC-05 CCO-00 OMB-01 FBO-02 CU-02

SY-05 ABF-01 FS-01 PC-01 /086 W
----- 072334

R 131022Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8146

INFO USIA WASHDC

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COTONOU 0260

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: AFSP, PFOR, DM, US

SUBJ: BENIN GOVT NOTICE EVICTING USG FROM ITS CHANCERY

REF A - COTONOU 211, B - COTONOU 198,

SUMMARY: EMBASSY HAS RAISED EVICTION NOTICE WITH FORNMIN AND DIR OF PROTOCOL, GPRB POSITION IS THAT IT HAS SOVEREIGN RIGHT TO EVICT US WITHOUT PROVIDING EXPLANATION. EMBASSY CHANCERY COMPLEX IS RENTED, BENIN HAS NO RESPONSIBILITY TO PAY ANY RELOCATION COSTS. END SUMMARY

1. WHEN FORNMIN ALLADAYE CONVOKED AMB FEB 10, AMONG TOPICS RAISED BY LATTER WAS BENIN GOVT'S NOTICE THAT USG WOULD BE EVICED FROM ITS CHANCERY. EARLIER IN DAY, DCM HAD MED WITH DIR OF PROTOCOL (TONOKOUIN) AND HIS DEP (AGOSSOU) TO ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN CLARIFICATION ON NUMBER OF POINTS ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

2. IN BRIEF THE MIN TOLD THE AMB THAT EVICTION INCLUDES CULTURAL CENTER AND PAO'S RESIDENCE AS WELL AS CHANCERY. HIS GOVT DID NOT NEED TO PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION. BENIN WAS SOVEREIGN. THE
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REAONS FOR THE EVICTION WERE NONE OF OUR BUSINESS. WE COULD

RE-LOCATE SOMEWHERE WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. THE MIN DELCARED THAT THE USG HAD FAILED TO COOPERATE WITH BENINESE PROPOSALS MADE A YEAR AND HALF AGO THAT THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER GOVTS RE-LOCATE THEIR CHANCERIES IN A PROPOSED DIP ENCLAVE. (THE FILES HERE CONFIRM THAT WE OPPOSED THE BENINESE PROPOSALS.) WE HAD HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO DO WHAT THE BENIN GOVT WANTED.

3. EARLIER IN THE DAY DCM ORALLY PRESENTED TO THE PROTOCOL OFFICERS A LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR WHICH ANSWERS WERE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO SEEK INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON. THESE WERE: (1) DOES THE EVICTION NOTICE REFER ONLY TO THE CHANCER OR TO THE ADJOINING CULTURAL CENTER AND PAO'S RESIDENCE? (2) WHY ARE WE BEING ASKED TO MOVE? WHAT USE WILL BE MADE OF OUR CHANCERY? (3) THE NOTE MENTIONED REMODELING THE ZONE IN WHICH CHANCERY IS LOCATED, COULD THE MINISTRY INDICATE THE EXACT PERIMETERS OF WHAT ZONE? WE RENT THREE OTHER HOUSES IN THE VICINITY AND MUST KNOW IF WE WOULD BE EXPECTED TO VACATE THOSE AS WELL. (4) IS BENIN GOVT PREPARED TO REIMBURSE US OR IN ANY WAY OFFSET THE COSTS OF THE MOVE? (5) WILL BENIN GOVT ASSIST US IN FINDING ANOTHER SUITABLE LOCATION? (6) WHY WAS THE DATE LIMIT OF OCT 26 CHOSEN? IF WE ARE UNABLE TO LOCATE NEW RENTAL SPACE IN TIME, CAN WE EXPECT TO RECEIVE AN EXTENSION? IF NOT WHAT DO THEY EXPECT US TO DO IN THE INTERIM? ALSO INDICATED THAT WE HAVE BEEN LOCATED IN THE PRESENT CHANCERY FOR 15 YEARS, OVER THAT TIME WE HAVE INVESTED A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY AND EFFORT IN MAKING THE PRESENT BUILDING SUITABLE TO OUR NEEDS. THEREFORE THIS EMBASSY CONSIDERED THE ORDER TO MOVE A SERIOUS MATTER AS IT WILL INVOLVE CONSIDERABLE INCONVENIENCE AND EXPENSE TO THE USG.

4. THE MEETING WAS UNSATISFACTORY BECAUSE THE PROTOCOL OFFICIALS WERE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO PROVIDE ANSWERS TO MOST OF THE QUESTIONS. THOSE FEW REPLIES RECEIVED WERE MOSTLY CONTRADICTORY. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS DENIED ANY RESPONSIBILITY, CLAIMING TO BE MERE MESSENGERS FOR THE MIN OF THE INTERIOR (AZONHIHO).

5. AT ONE POINT TONOLOUIN INDICATED THAT THERE WAS A MASTER PLAN TO RAZE ALL OF THE BUILDINGS IN THE AREA AND PUT UP NEW

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MODERN STRUCTURES (THE COST FOR NEAR-BANKRUPT BENIN WOULD BE MILLIONS). HE SAID THAT OTHER OCCUPANTS OF THE AREA WOULD RECEIVE EVICTION NOTICES AT A LATER DATE. AT ANOTHER POINT HE INDICATED THAT HE WAS NOT CERTAIN EVERYONE IN THE AREA WOULD HAVE TO MOVE NOR COULD HE TELL US IF THE PAO'S RESIDENCE WAS INCLUDED. HE HAD NO IDEA OF THE AREA COVERED BY THE RENEWAL PLAN.

6. IN THE MIDST OF THE CONVERSATION, OUT OF THE BLUE, THE
PROTOCOL CHIEF SAID "WE ARE NOT BOTHERED BY THE FACT THAT YOU
ARE SO CLOSE TO CAMP GUEZO. THAT IS NOT WHY YOU ARE BEING ASKED
TO MOVE. BE ASSURED THAT THIS IS NOTHING AIMED AGAINST YOU."

7. LIKE THE FORNMIN (IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH AMB), THE MIN-
ISTRY OFFICIALS RESURRECTED THE DIPLOMATIC ENCLAVE ISSUE
(WHICH WE THOUGHT WAS LONG DEAD). (SEE 74 STATE 210247 AND
74 COTONOU 1425.) OFFICIALS EXPRESSED GPRB'S DESIRE TO SEE
EMBASSY CONSTRUCT A NEW MODERN EMBASSY "WORTHY OF A GREAT
POWER SUCH AS THE UNITED STATES." THE GPRB WANTS TO MODERNIZE
COTONOU, THEY CLAIM AND DID NOT CONSIDER OUR LOW PROFILE UN-
OBTRUSIVE CHANCERY ADEQUATE. THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT IT WAS
NOT BEFITTING BENIN'S NATIONAL PRIDE.
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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05

IGA-02 A-01 OPR-02 OC-05 CCO-00 OMB-01 FBO-02 CU-02

SY-05 ABF-01 FS-01 PC-01 (ISO) W

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8147

INFO USIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 COTONOU 0260

8. AFTER DECLARING BENIN'S SOVEREIGN RIGHT TO REQUIRE US TO
MOVE, TONOLOUIN SAID THAT HIS GOVT WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO
PAY ANY COSTS OF THE MOVE. THE GPRB WOULD BE WILLING TO SELL
US PROPERTY ON WHICH TO BUILD AND WOULD INDICATE A SUITABLE
LOCATION.

9. WHEN DCM SAID THAT SEVEN MONTHS' LEAD TIME WOULD NOT BE

SUFFICIENT FOR RELOCATION, FORNMINISTRY OFFICIALS SAID IF WE REQUESTED AN EXTENSION IN WRITING TO EFFECT THE MOVE TO A DIFFERENT BUILDING, THEY WERE SURE WE WOULD BE ACCORDED ONE. IF WE UNDERTOOK TO BUILD THEY BELIEVED THAT AN EXTENSION OF ONE OR TWO YEARS COULD BE ARRANGED.

10. THE OFFICIALS SAID THEY WOULD SEEK REPLIES TO OUR QUESTIONS IF WE SUBMITTED THEM IN WRITING IN FORM OF A DIP NOTE.

11. COMMENT: IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN US AND BENIN, AND THE FACT THAT THE ORDER ORIGINATED WITH THE MIN OF INTERIOR AND NATIONAL ORIENTATION AZONHIHO, THE EMBASSY CONSIDERS THE EVICTION ORDER TO BE THE BENIN GOVT'S REPRISAL FOR DIFFICULTIES USG ALLEGEDLY CAUSING BENIN
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IN CONNECTION WITH SUSPENSION OF BRIDGE/DAM ACTIVITIES PENDING HICKENLOOPER ADMENDMENT REVIEW. FORNMIN ALLADAYE'S ANGRY REACTION TO THE AMB'S QUESTIONS RE EVICTION AND MINISTRY OFFICIALS'S UNWILLINGNESS OR INABILITY TO REPLY TO OUR QUESTIONS WE INTERPRET AS A SMOKE SCREEN TO COVER THE GOVT'S ACTUAL MOTIVATION.

12. EMBASSY HAS CONDUCTED BRIEF INVESTIGATION OF AREA AND DETERMINED THAT NO ONE ELSE, INCLUDING THE UNDP WHICH HAS AN OFFICE ACROSS THE STREET FROM CHANCERY HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED TO MOVE. THE CLAIM THAT THERE IS A PLAN TO RAZE THE BUILDINGS IN THE AREA TO CONSTRUCT A NEW MODERN ZONE IS LUDICROUS. FIRST THE GPRB CERTAINLY DOES NOT HAVE THE FUNDS FOR SUCH A GRAND SCHEME. SECONDLY, IF THERE WERE SUCH A PLAN, THERE ARE SCORES OF OTHER AREAS OF THE CITY MUCH MORE IN NEED OF A FACE LIFTING THAN THE ONE IN WHICH THE CHANCERY IS LOCATED. IT IS OF COURSE POSSIBLE THAT THE AREA WILL BE USED FOR A REDOUBT AS NOTED IN REF B.

13. IN ADDITION TO THE REPRISAL FACTOR THE GOVT HAS A DUAL PURPOSE IN WANTING US TO MOVE. FIRST TO GET US AWAY FROM THE MILITARY CAMP AND SECOND TO FORCE US INTO BUILDING A MODERN STRUCTURE CONSISTENT WITH BENIN'S SELF-ESTEEM. THE PRESENT GPRB EFFORT MAY BE A MEANS OF PRESSUING US INTO ACCEPTING THE ENCLAVE IDEA. THE GPRB MUST BE AWARE THAT FINDING SUITABLE AND ADEQUATE SPACE FOR RENT WOULD BE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE IN COTONOU (DESPITE FORNMINISTER'S EXCLAMATION THAT SPACE IS EASY TO FIND). FORCING US TO BUILD WOULD ALSO HELP THE ALMOST DORMANT CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY AND INFUSE SOME MONEY IN THIS LANGUISHING ECONOMY. THE WILLINGNESS TO GRANT AN EXTENSION OF THE MOVING DATE BY A YEAR OR TWO WOULD APPEAR TO GIVE LIE TO THE EXCUSE THAT THERE IS AN URBAN RE-NEWAL PLAN.

14. RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION:

A. WITH DEPT'S APPROVAL, EMBASSY WILL SUBMIT NOTE CONTAINING QUESTIONS OUTLINED IN PARA 1 (EXCEPT QUESTION 1) PLUS OTHERS DEPT MAY SUGGEST.

B. THAT WE ADVISE OUR CONTRACTOR TO SUSPEND WORK ON THE CHANCERY
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RENOVATION UNTIL AT LEST 1 OCT 76.

C. THAT THE EMBASSY WITHHOLD INFORMING MINISTRY OF OUR PLANS UNTIL WE ARE SATISFIED THAT THE ORDER IS NOT DISCRIMINATORY. IF WE DETERMINE IT WAS AIMED AGAINST US, WE SHOULD INFORM THE MINISTRY THAT THE USG IS NOT PREPARED TO UNDERGO THE EXPENSE OF BUILDING A NEW CHANCERY.

15. STATE 35068 JUST RECEIVED THIS MORNING. PRESENT MESSAGE WAS COMPOSED FEB 11 BUT COULD NOT BE TRANSMITTED OWING TO COUNTRY TEAM'S PREOCCUPATION WITH BENIN GOVT'S CONFRONTATION WITH AMB YESTERDAY. WE ARE SENDING THIS MESSAGE AS AN UPDATE ON ACTIONS WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN RE CHANCERY. INSTRUCTIONS CONTAINED IN STATE 35068 BEING CARRIED OUT.
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Message Attributes

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